

Reflections on **MY FAMILY**



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Reflections on MY FAMILY



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Reflections on My Family

Produced by the
Audio-Visual Unit
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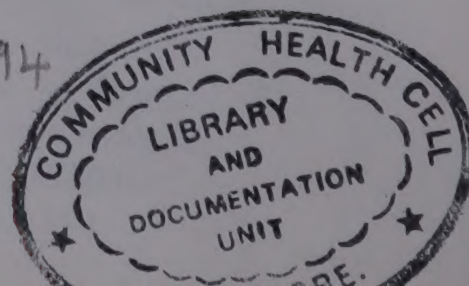
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I am Maya.

Like you, I too belong to a family, consisting of my Grandpa, Mummy, Daddy, my older brother Dilip, Raja Uncle, Daddy's younger brother, Suman Aunty, his wife, my two cousins, Soni and Moni, and Jaya Aunty, Daddy's youngest sister, who is separated from her husband.

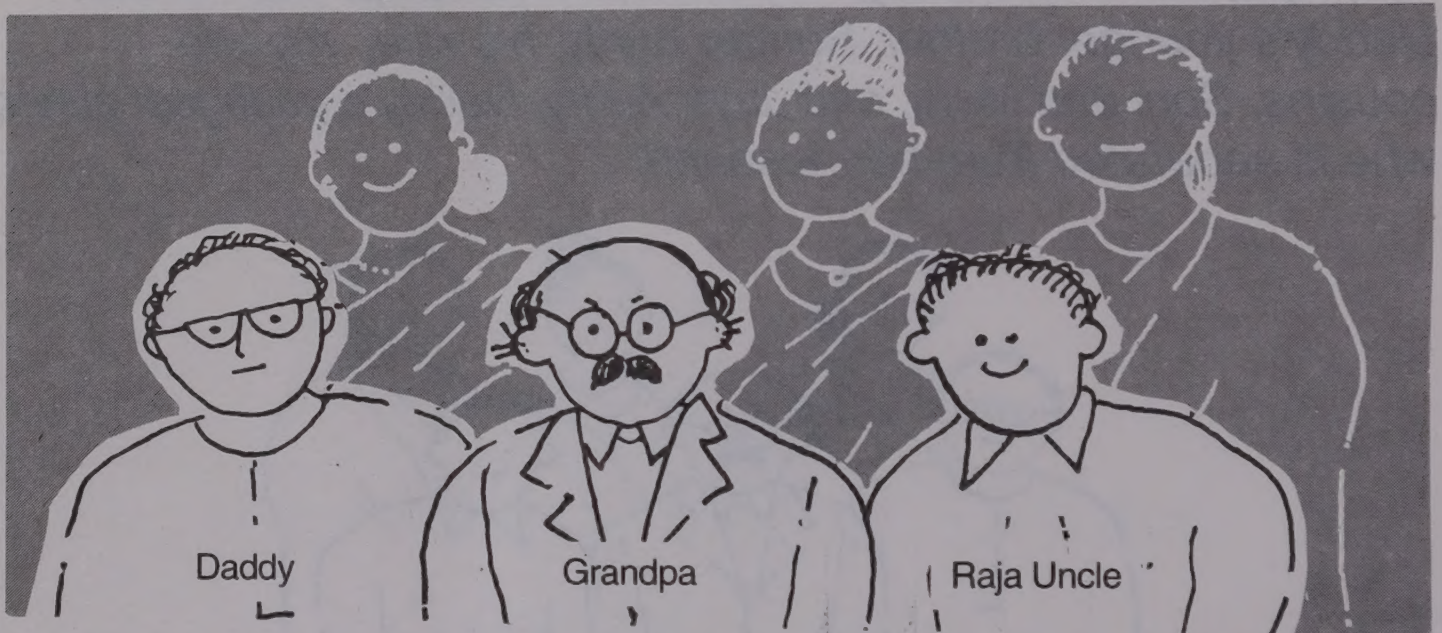


Here we are, in this photograph taken for Grandpa's 70th birthday, all of us stiff and smiling, in our shiny best.

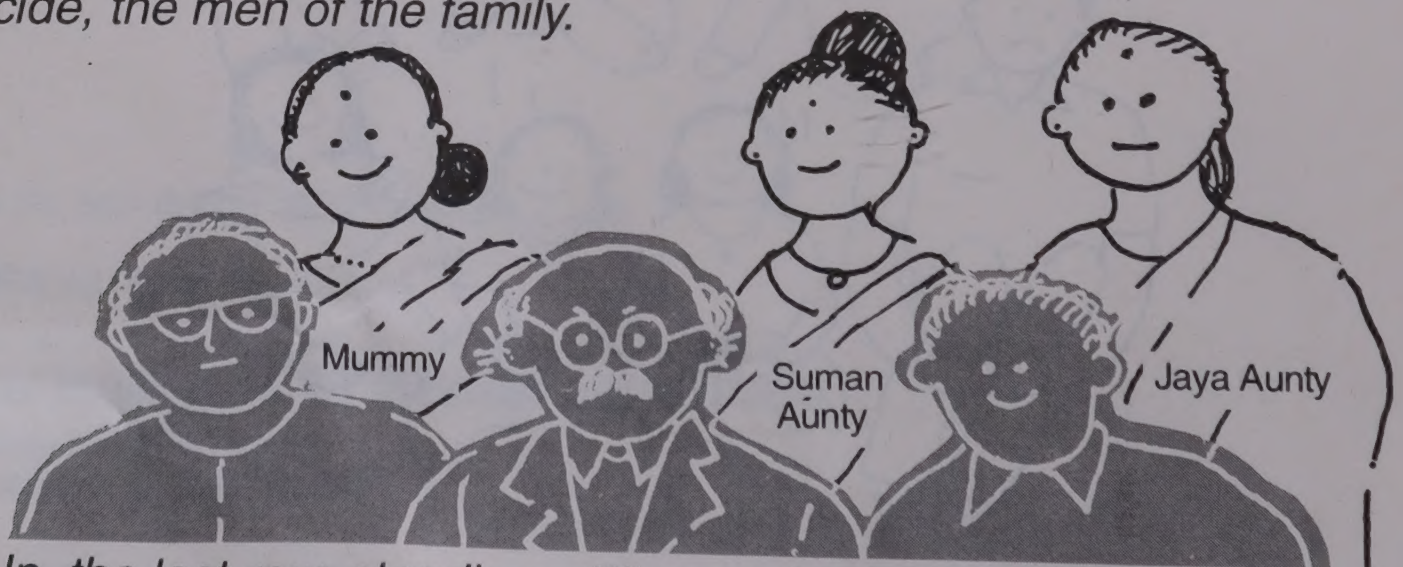
You might wonder why I am telling you all about my family. There's nothing special about my family. It's probably just like yours. Just a normal, middle class family, living in a town, carrying on its normal every day activities, nothing remarkable or dramatic.

But for sometime now, I have been feeling uncomfortable, even angry, about many little day-to-day happenings in my 'normal' family. Perhaps these things happen in your family too, so I want to share my discomfort with you.

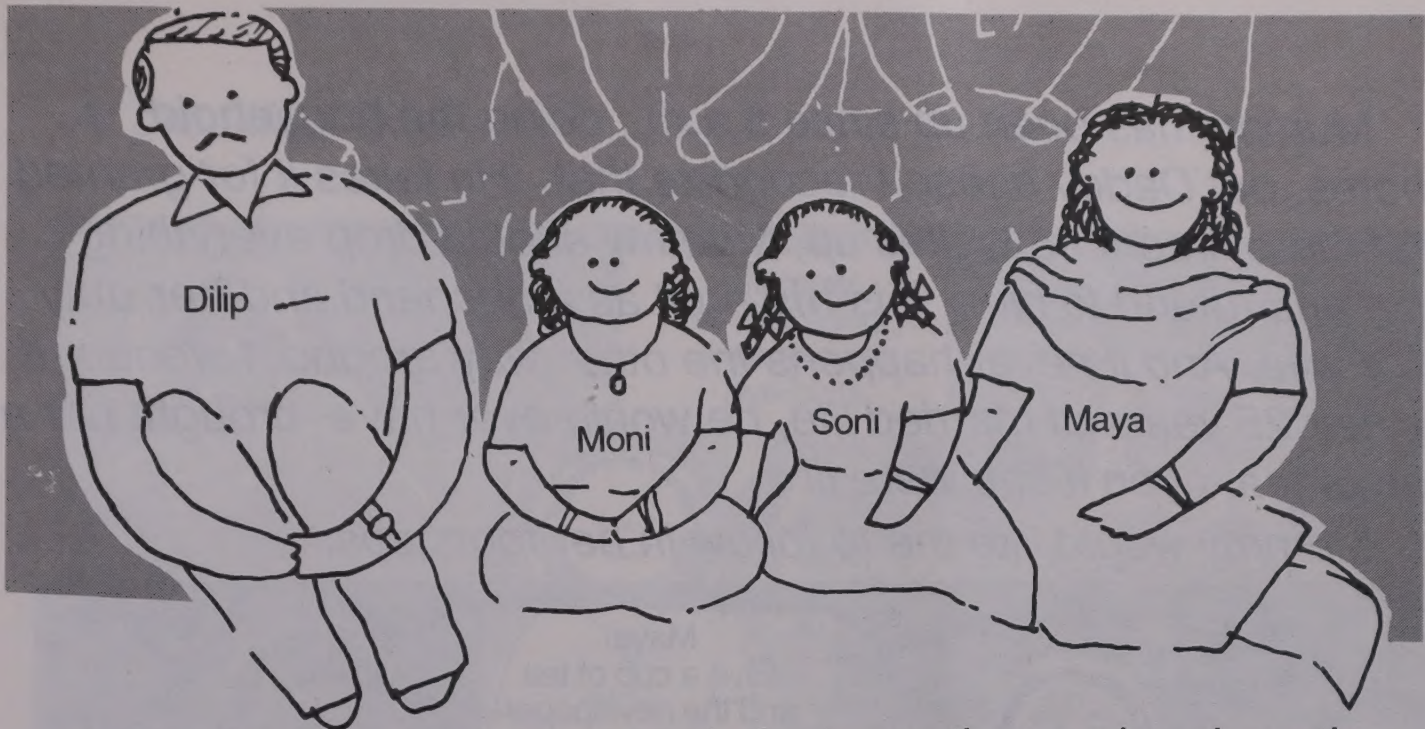
In my family, there is a clear pecking order. You can see it even from the way we are placed in the family photograph.



In the middle row, comfortably seated, are those who decide, the men of the family.



In the last row, standing stiffly, are those who implement these decisions, the womenfolk.

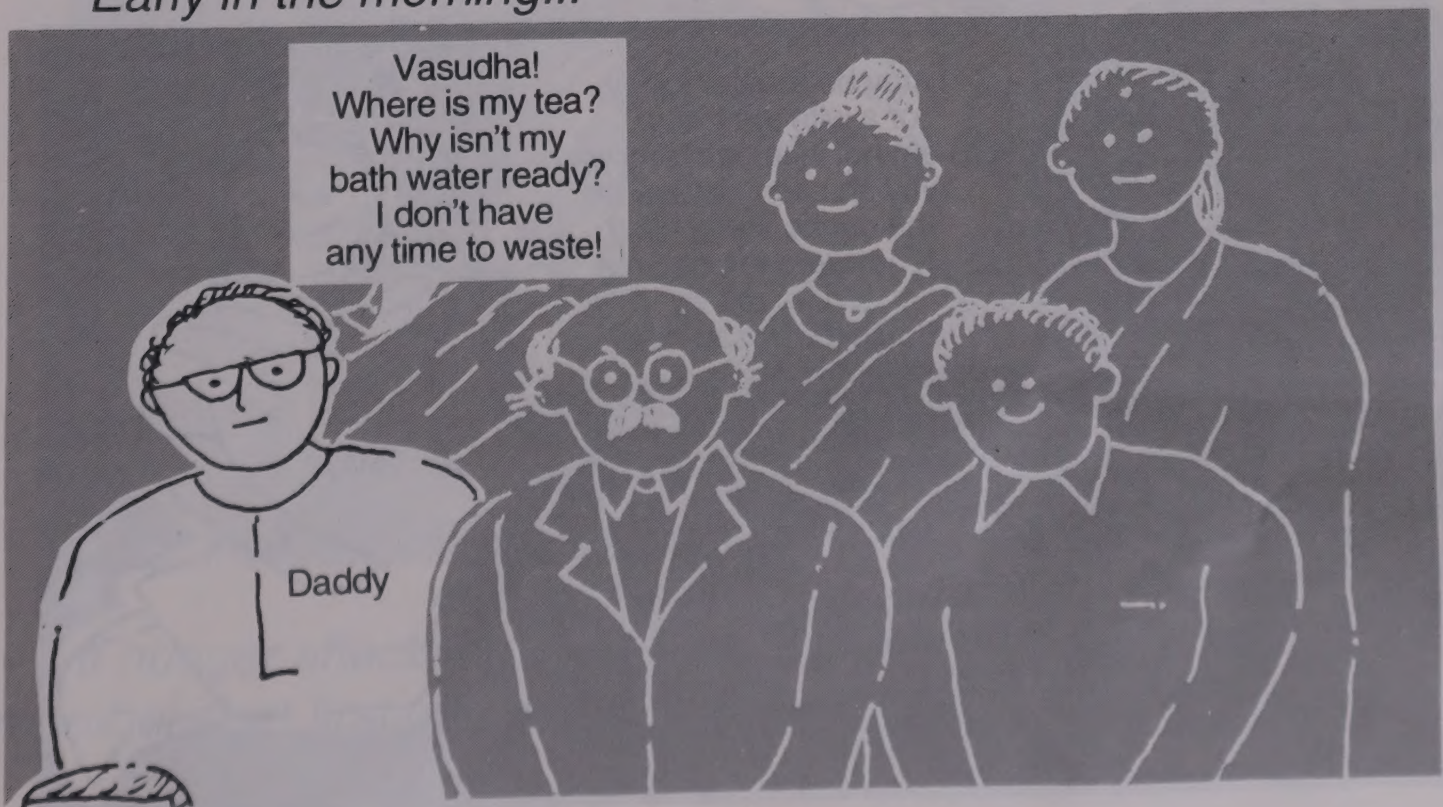


In the front row, at everyone's feet, are those who obey, the children. This hierarchy is taken for granted as natural and inevitable: the women must obey the men, the young must obey the old.

Of course, if you are like Dilip, the eldest son, then you would have enough elbow room within your allotted space - most of the time, anyway. But what about the rest of us? Don't we too have our hopes, desires and dreams?

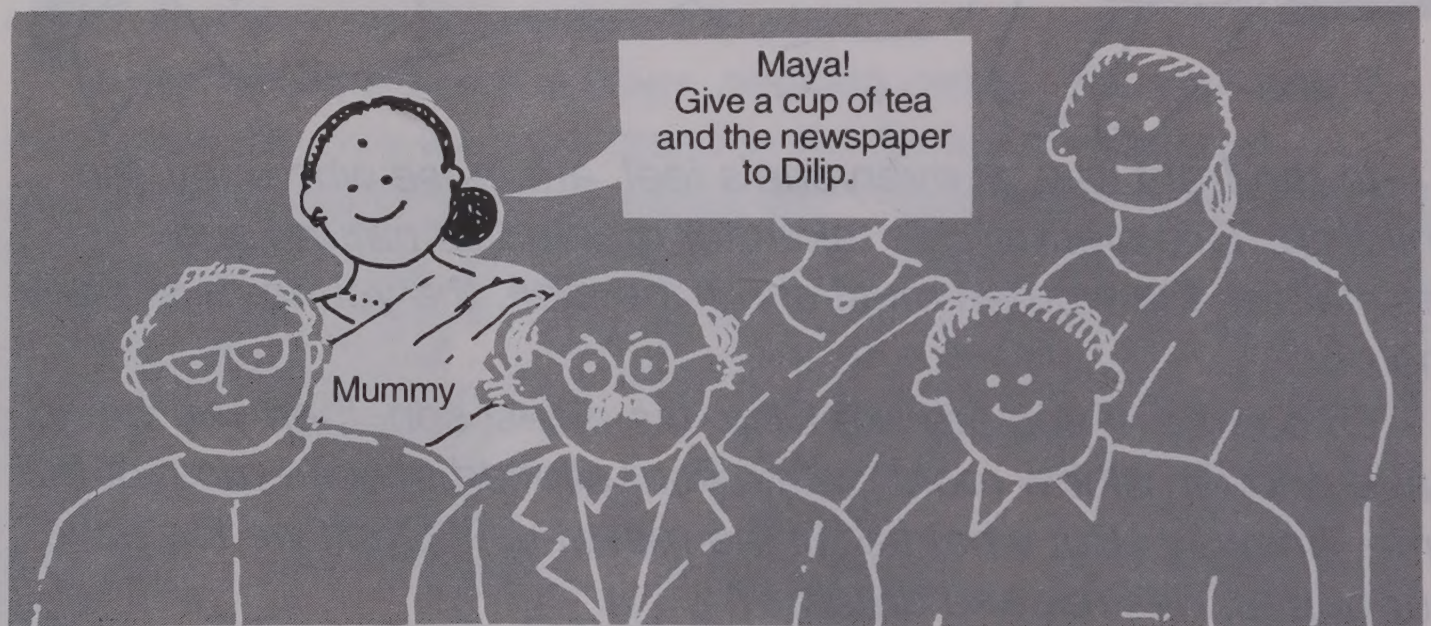
Take a typical day in our household.

Early in the morning...

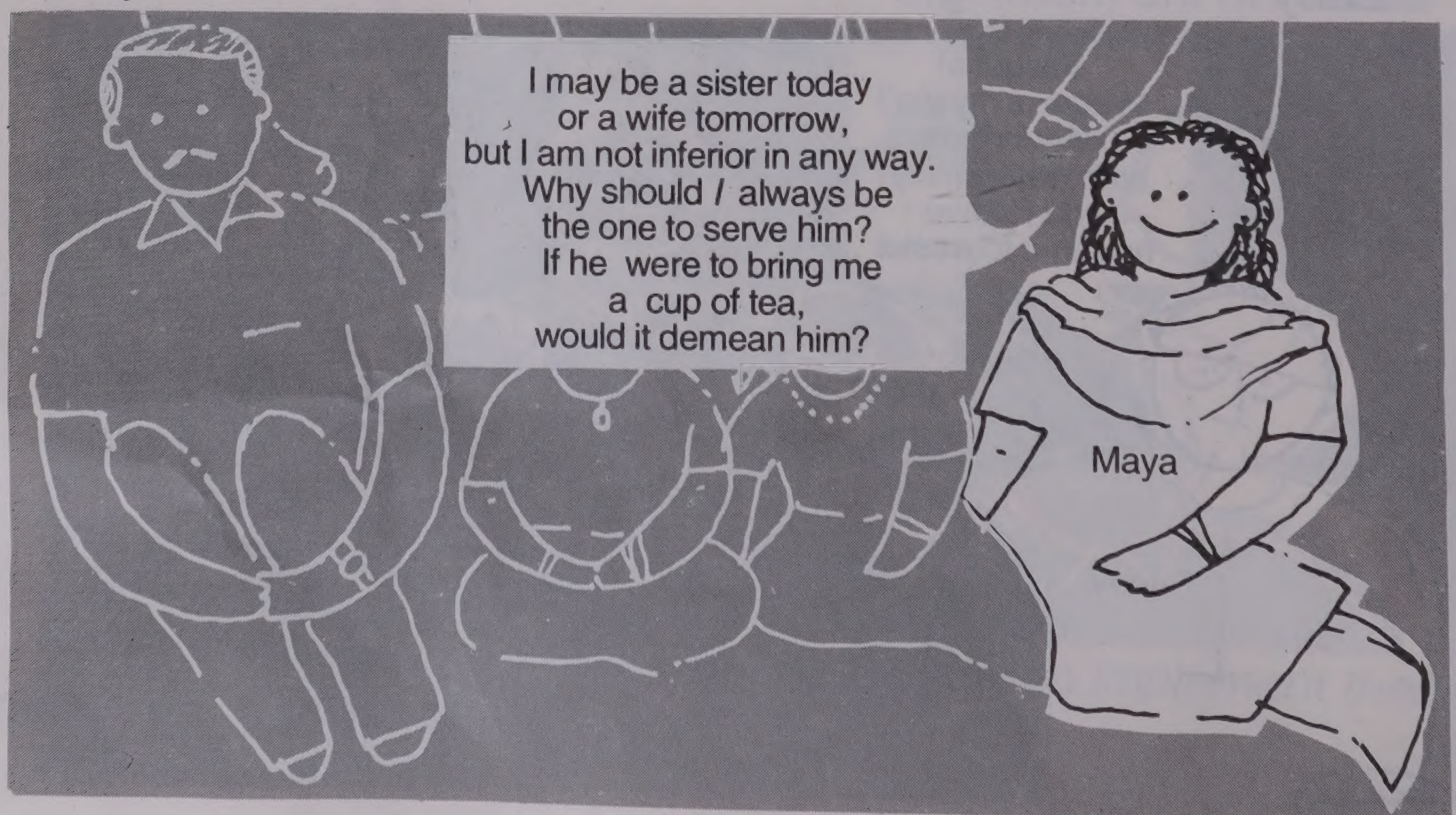


Mummy has been up since 5 a.m., doing the household chores, but Daddy doesn't recognize that. He takes it for granted that the moment he wakes up, Mummy should drop everything else and attend to him. It is **his** right as a husband and **her** duty as a wife. And it never happens the other way around. I wonder if in their 25 years of married life, he would ever have brought her a cup of tea, even if she were ill.

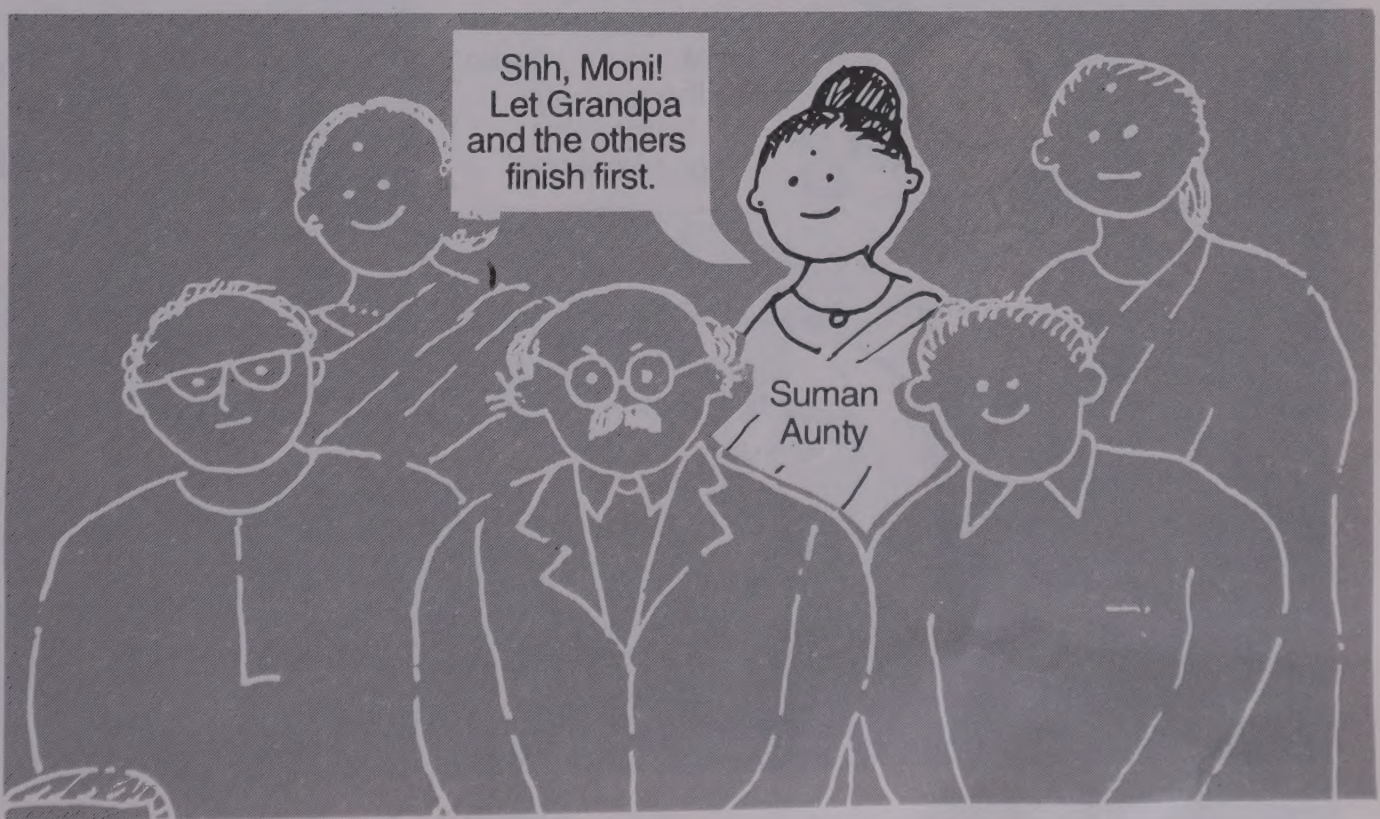
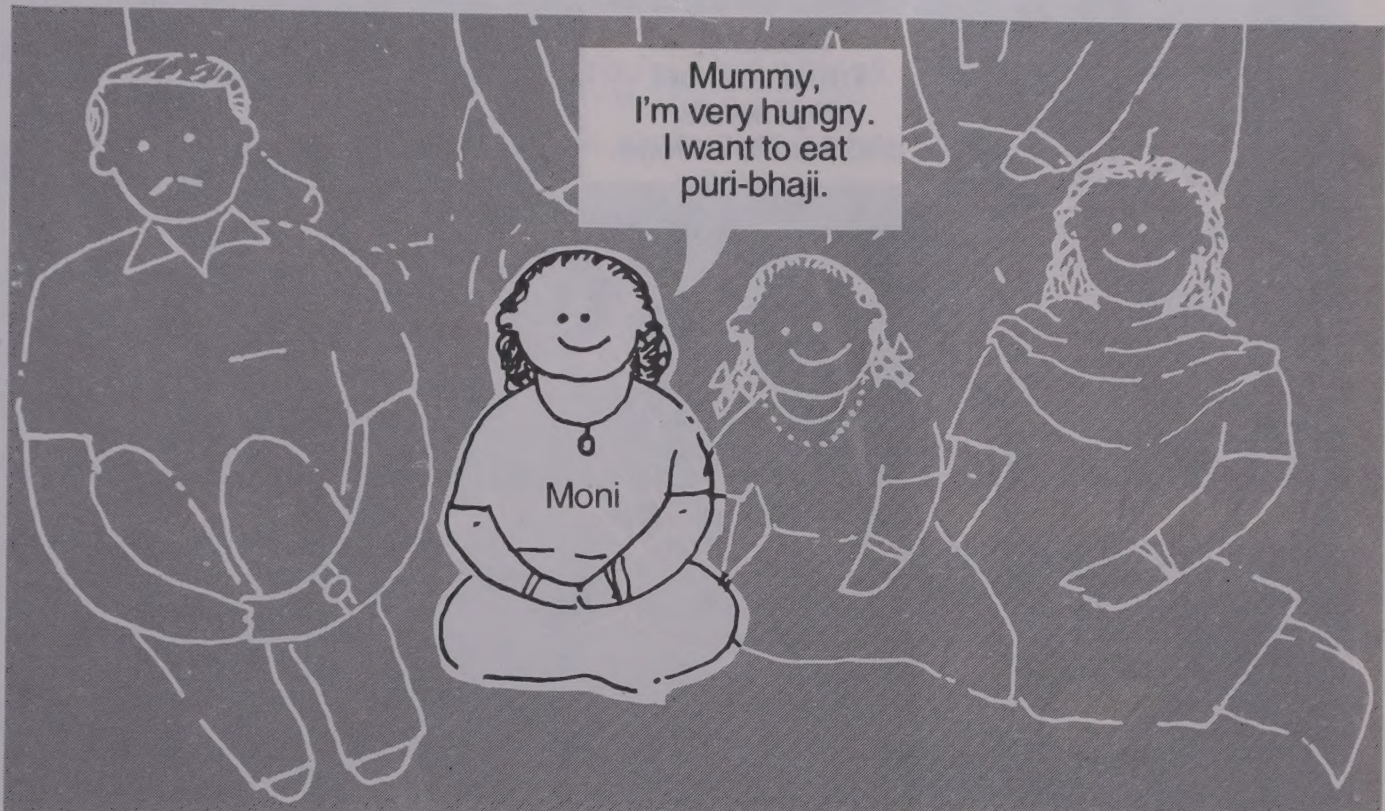
Mummy would like me to follow in her footsteps.



One of these days, I'll tell Mummy what I really feel. The way she pampers Dilip, he's bound to become a husband just like Daddy.

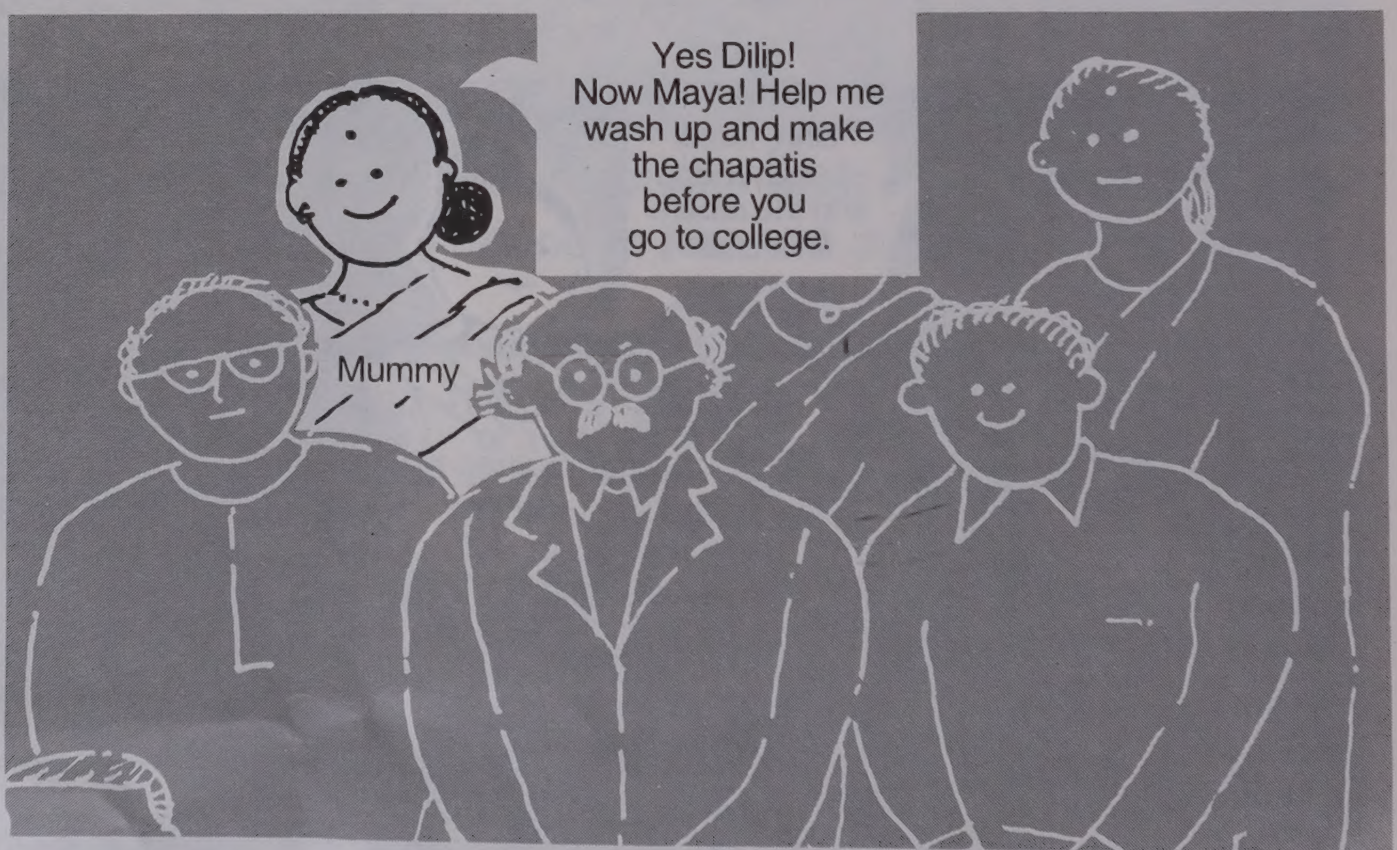
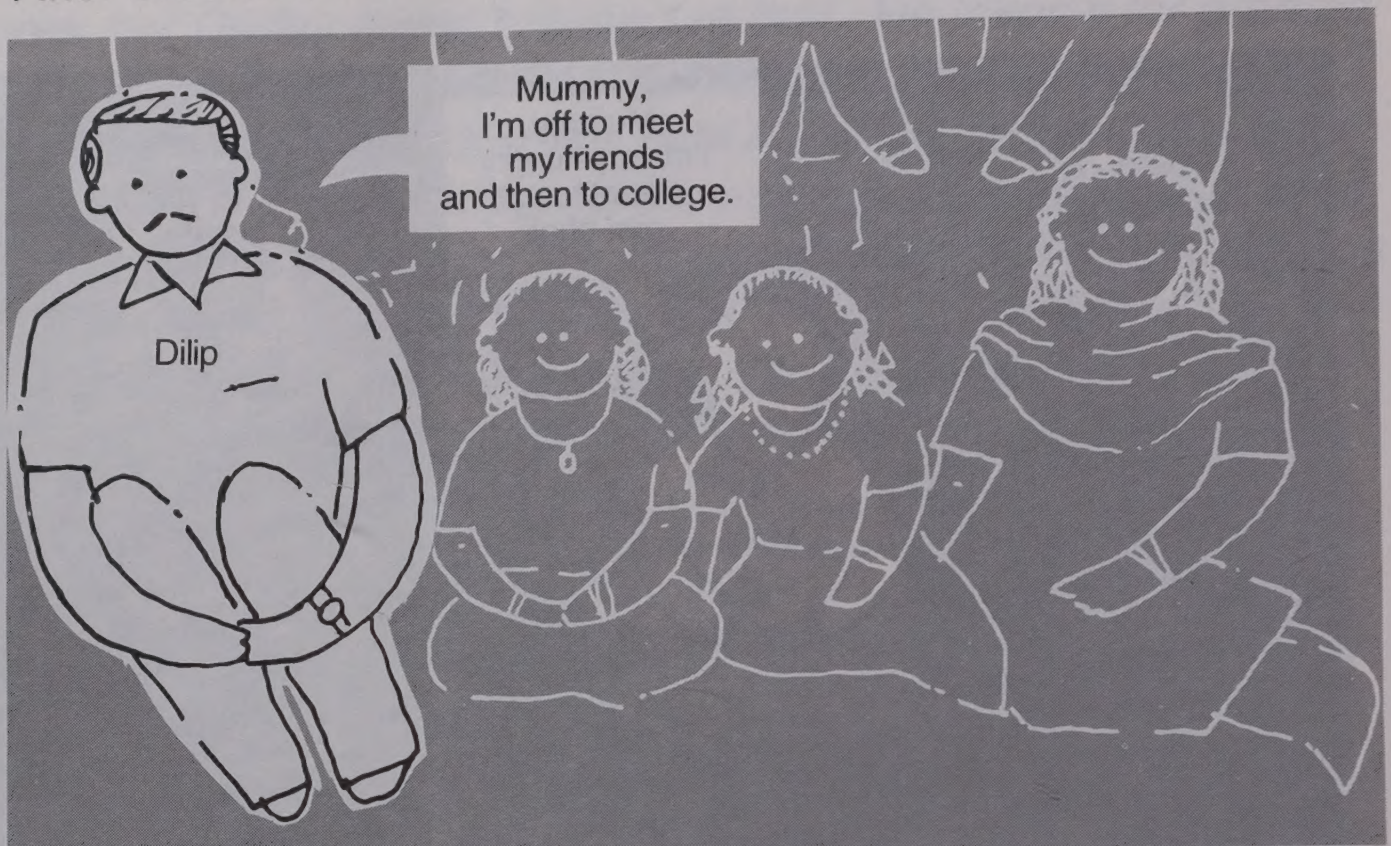


At breakfast time...



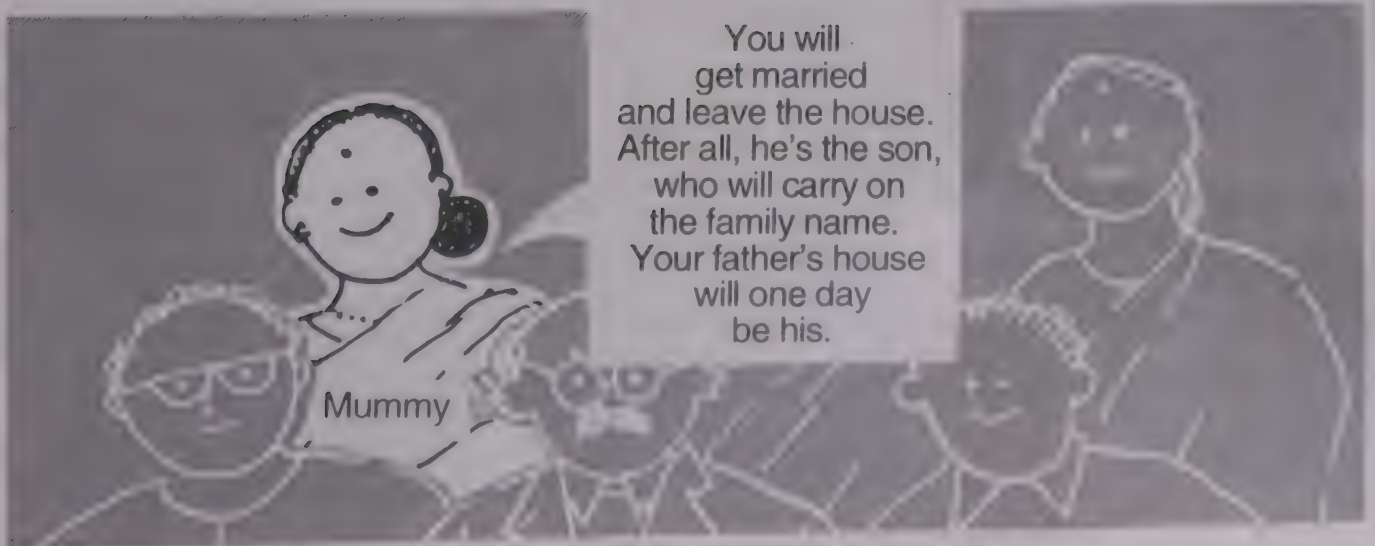
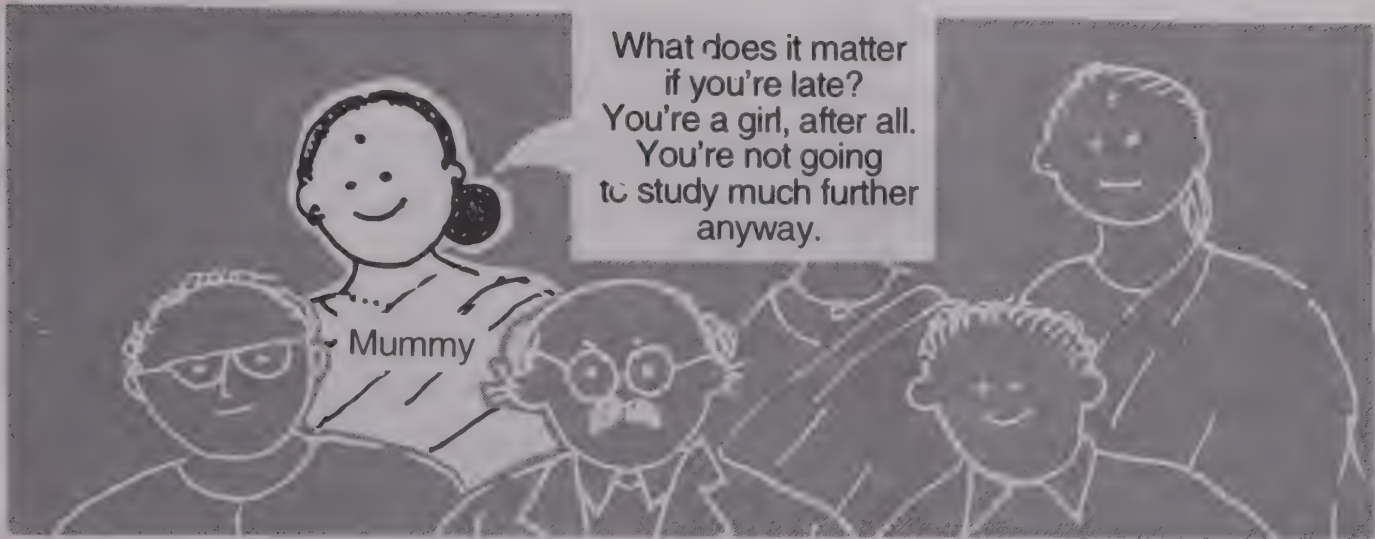
If hunger affects everyone equally, why should the male family members get first preference at meal times?

After breakfast...



*Dilip strolls away to college without a care in the world,
while I hurry through the domestic chores, hoping that I will
not reach as late as yesterday.*

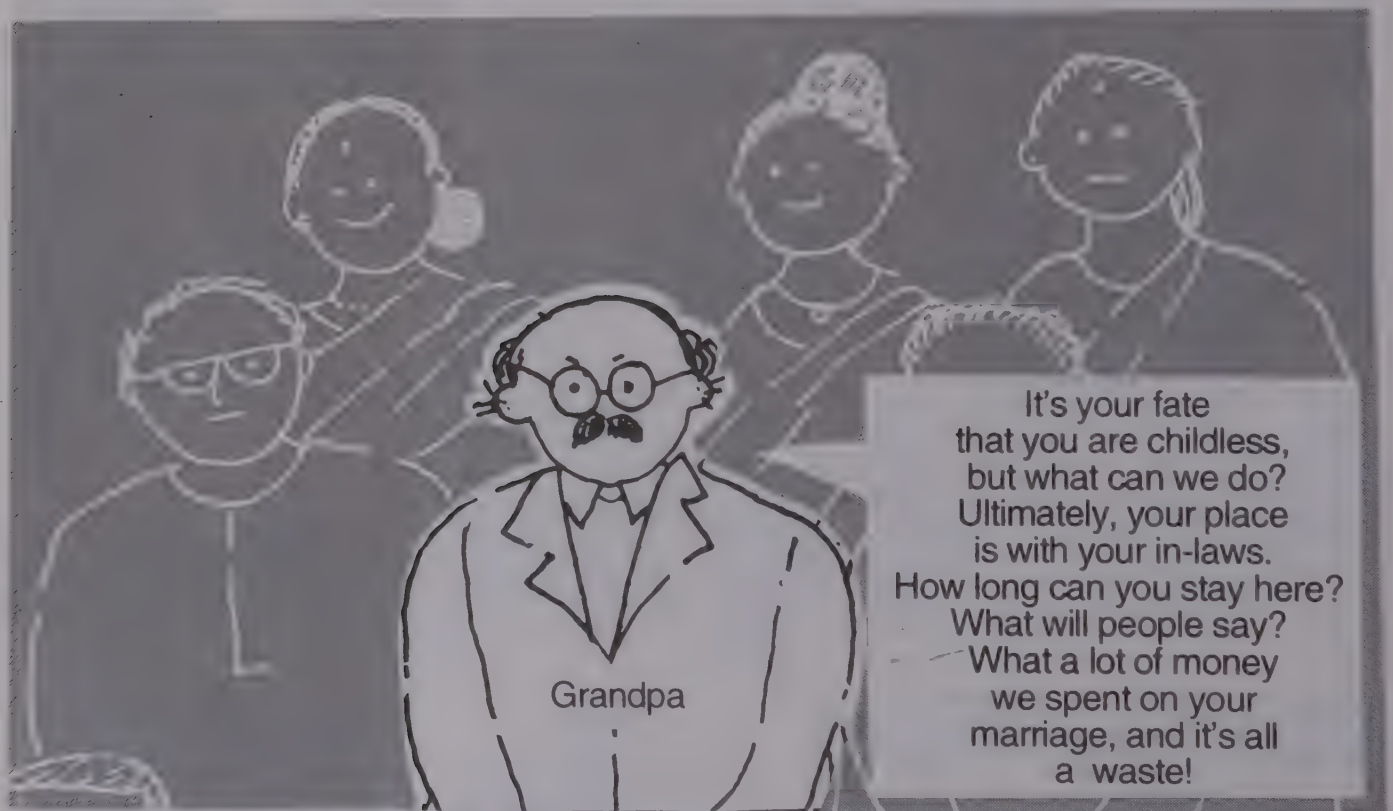
If I grumble :



We always take for granted that this is the way things have been and always will be. But, do you know that, in some cultures, it is the **women** who inherit the property?

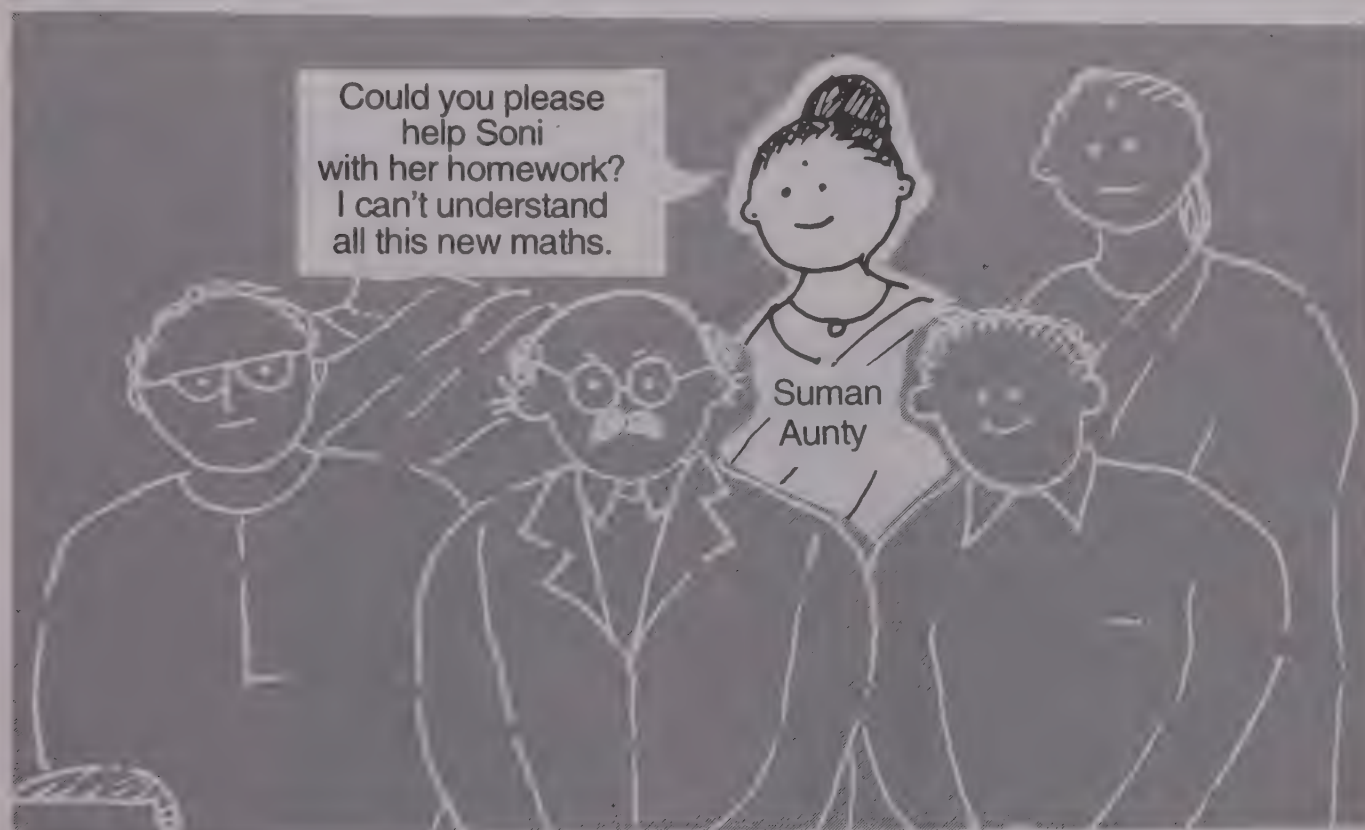
In my community, by law, both sons and daughters have equal rights to their parental property. But in practice, I've never heard of daughters inheriting any property.

When Jaya Aunty, was beaten and humiliated by her husband for not begetting a child, she was told by the elders that she must adjust, that she should keep up appearances, and that, above all, she should not bring dishonour to the family name. So Jaya Aunty struggled on for years, bearing an unjust burden of pain, guilt and shame, until her husband threw her out one day, and she was forced to return.

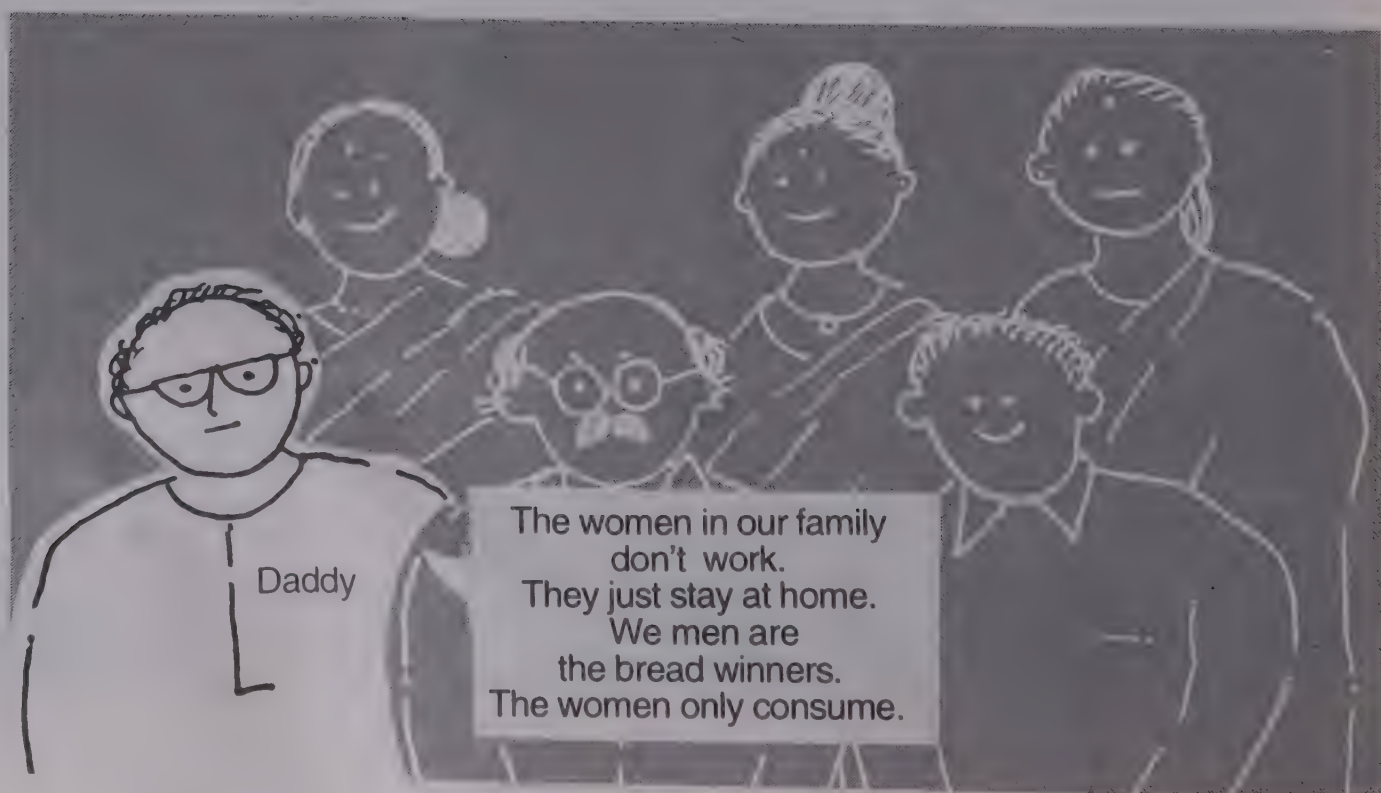


If Grandpa had spent the same money on giving Jaya Aunty a proper education and a house, she could perhaps have lived on her own, with dignity, instead of being at her husband's, father's or brother's mercy. And does being childless make her less of a human being?

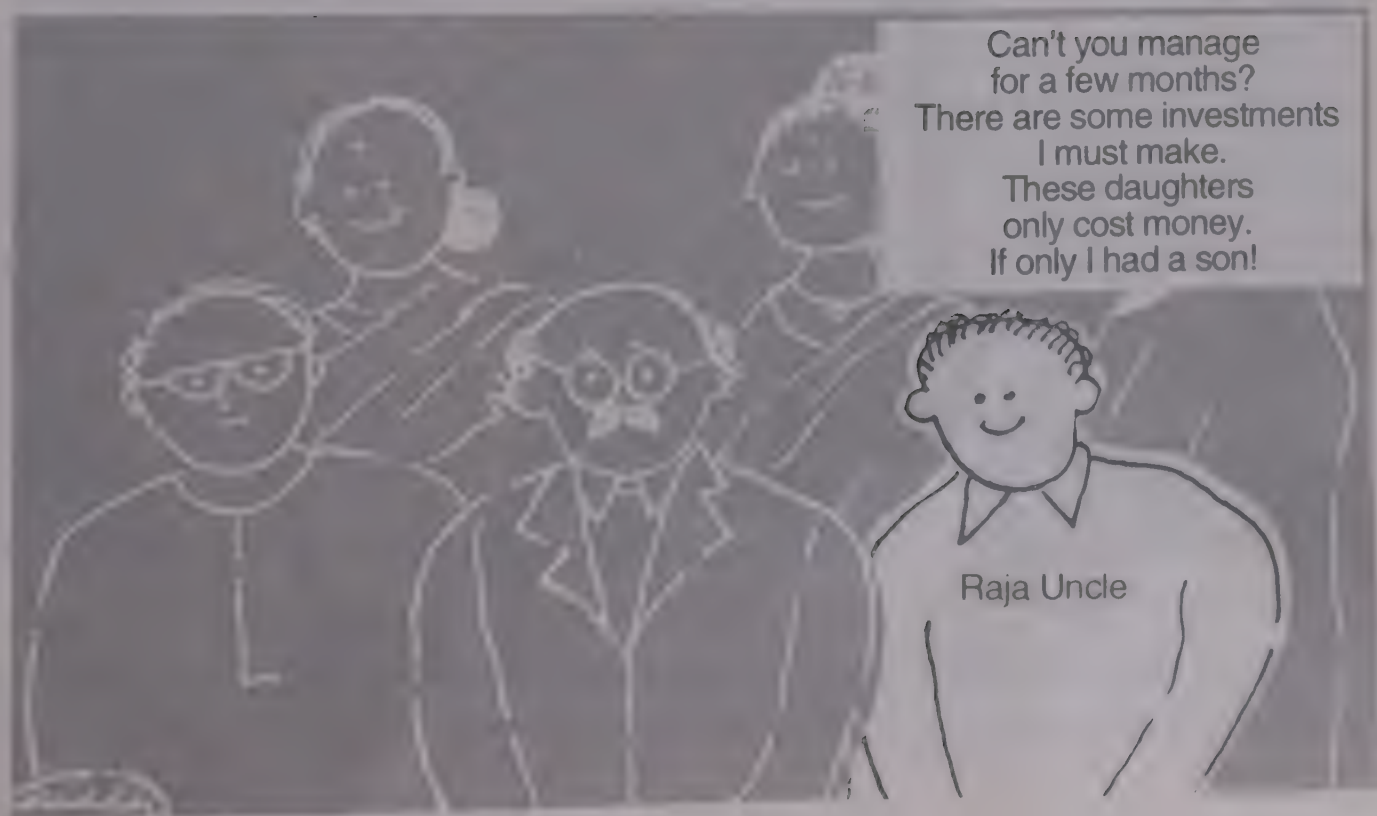
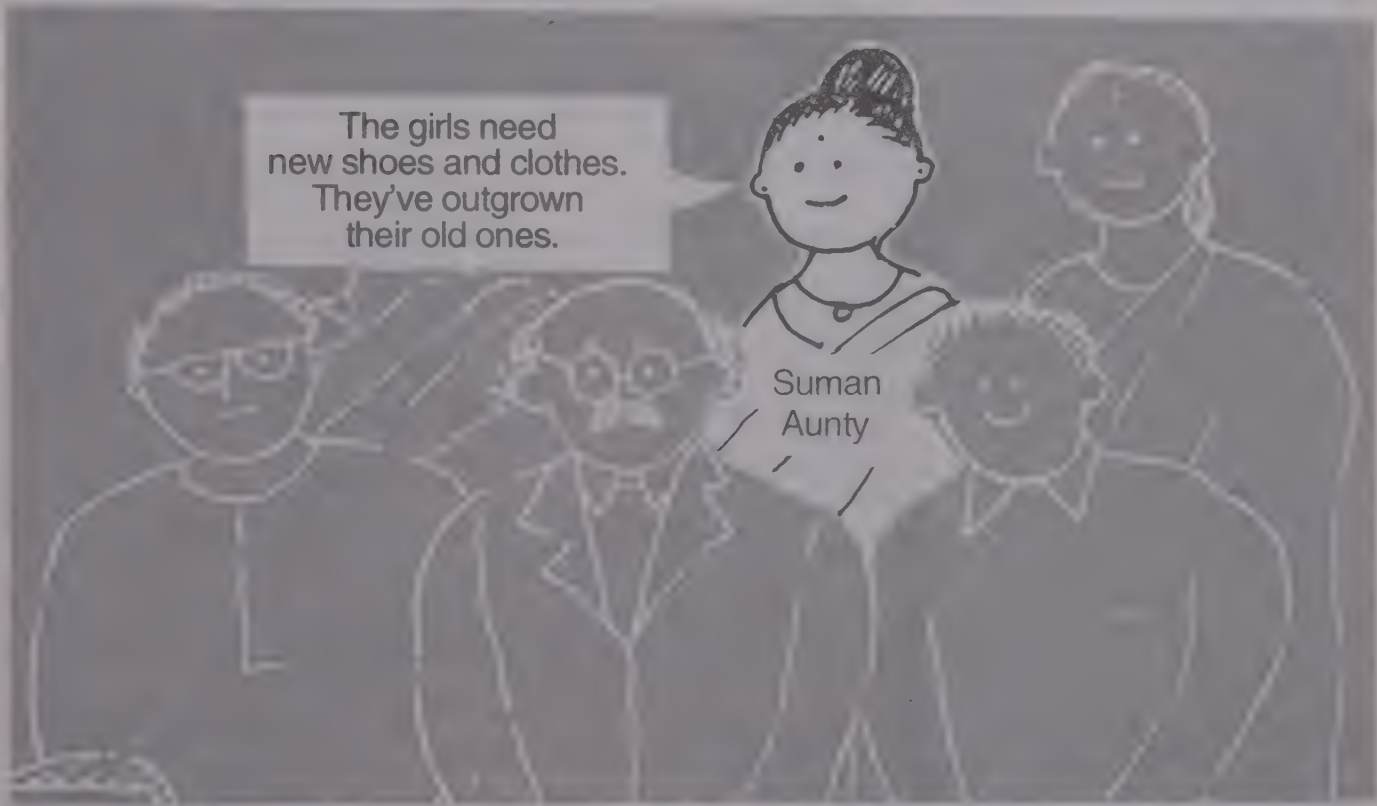
Back to the daily routine, in the evenings, the men return from work and relax, and the women continue to work.



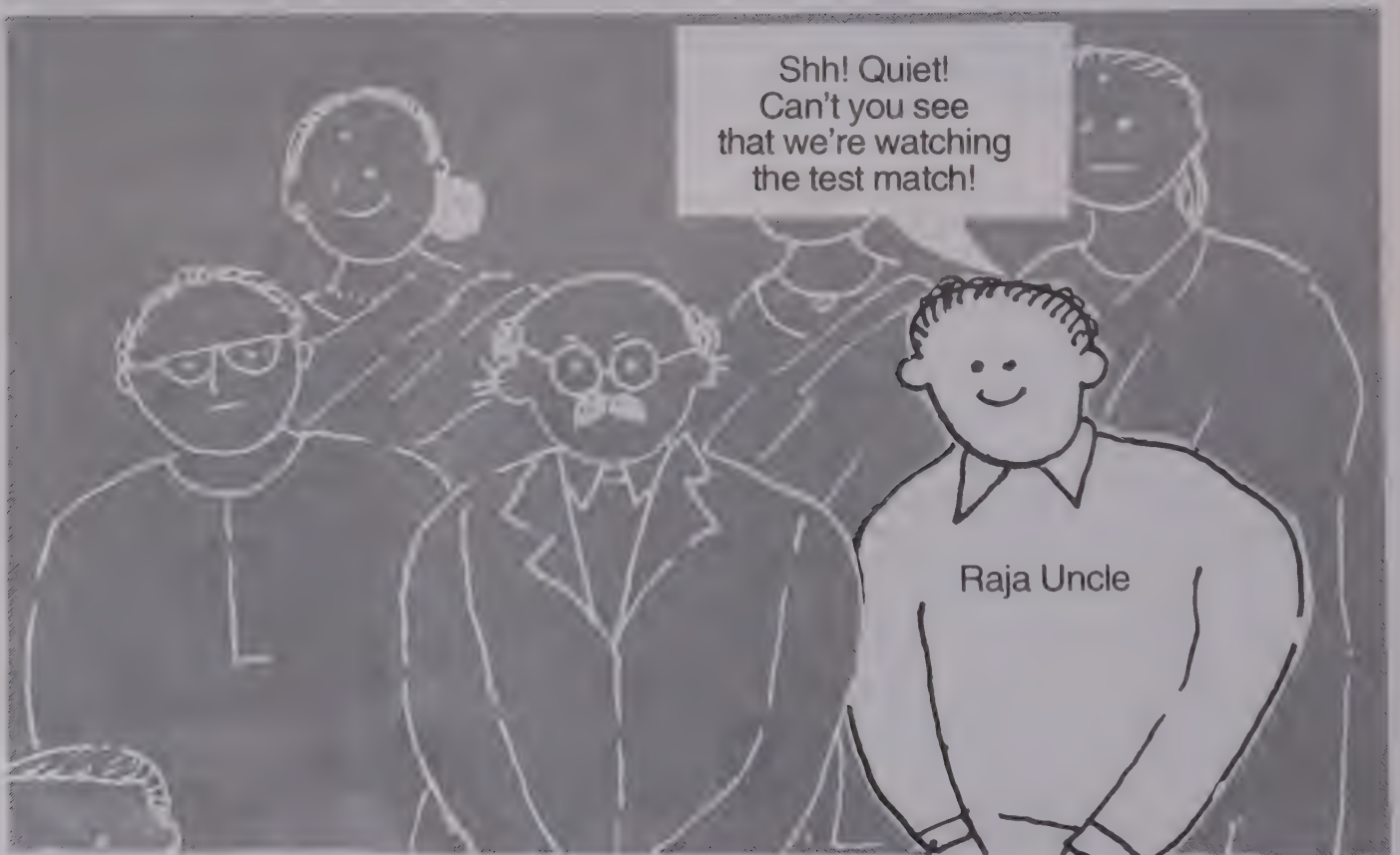
Anything to do with the children is seen as the women's responsibility, in addition to cooking, cleaning, shopping and an endless list of chores. I just don't know how Mummy and Suman Aunty manage to keep up their act.



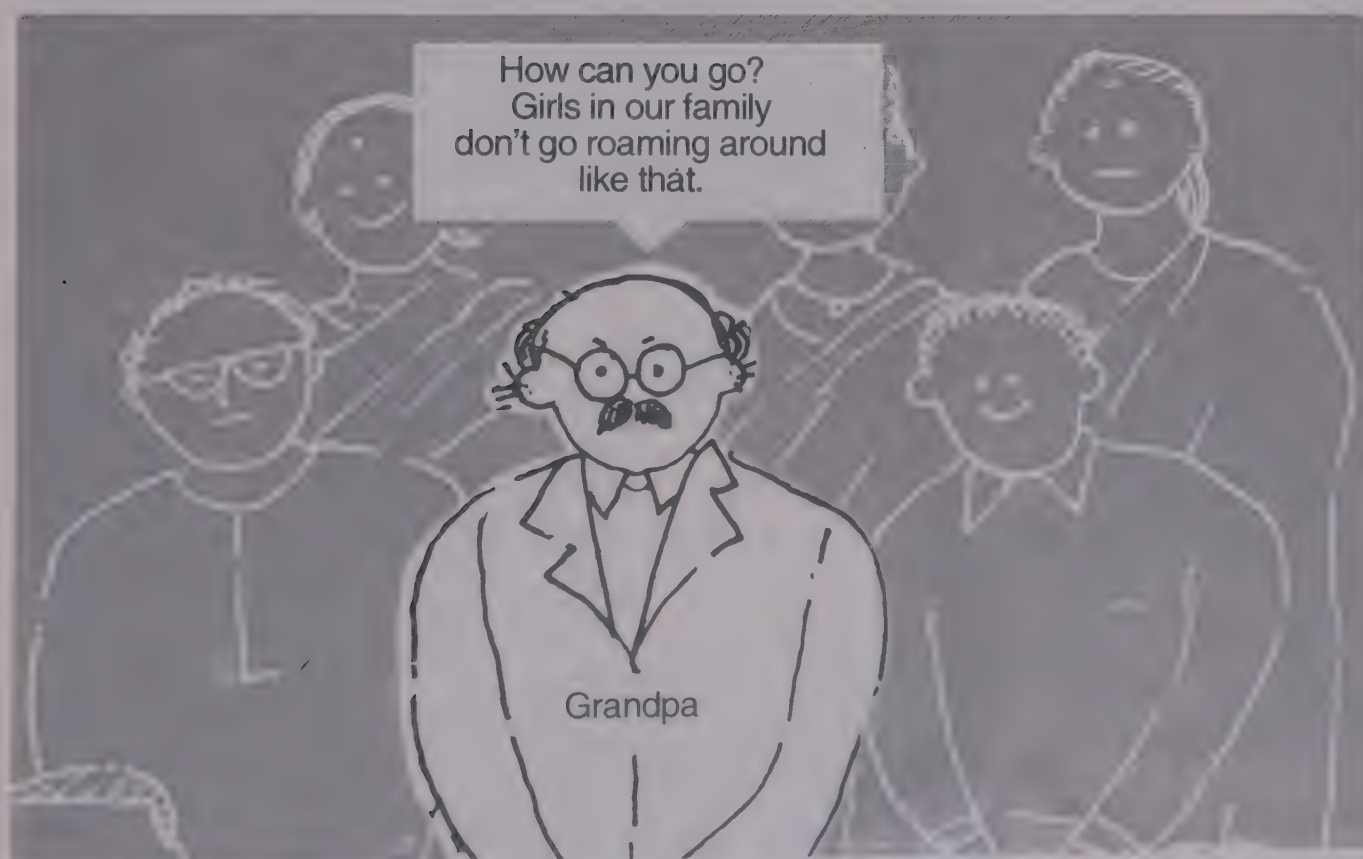
After all that unpaid, unrecognized work, the women in my family have no say in how the family earnings should be spent or invested. And investments are generally made in the men's names.



As the evening draws to a close, the family gathers around the TV set:

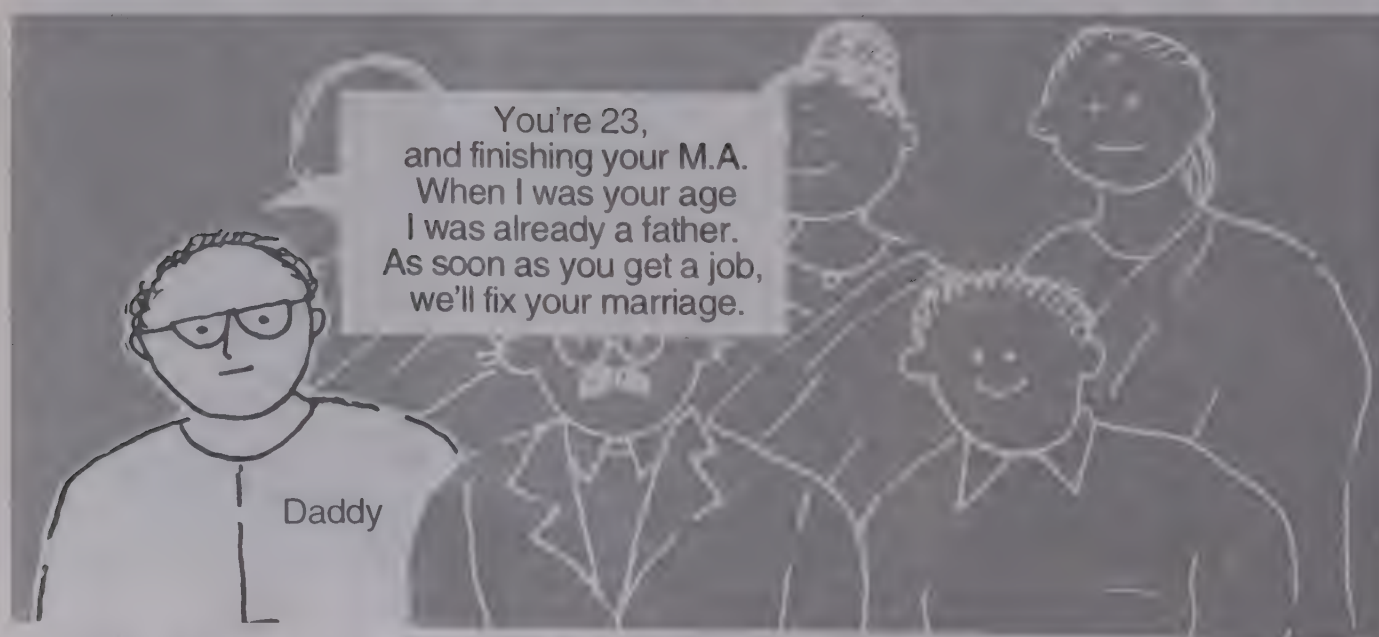
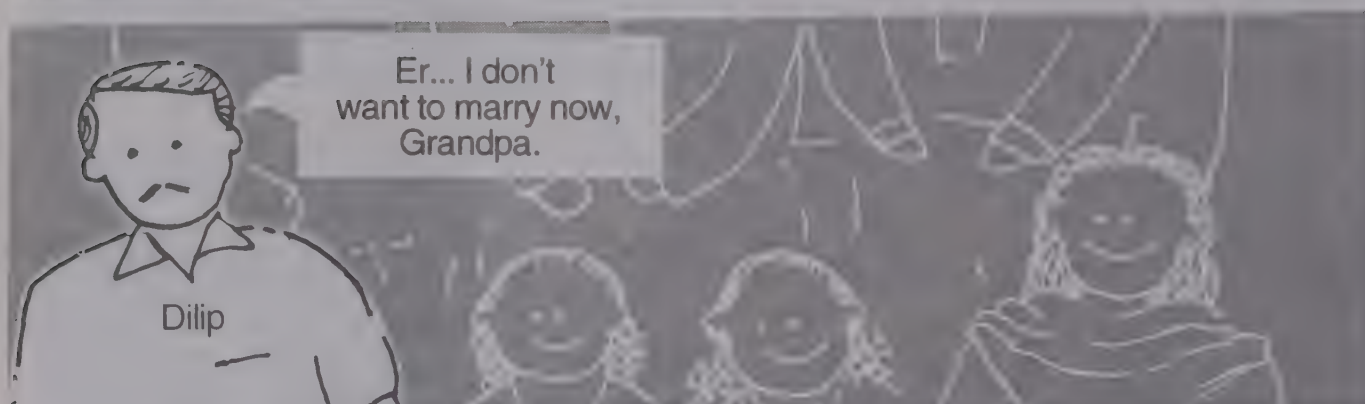
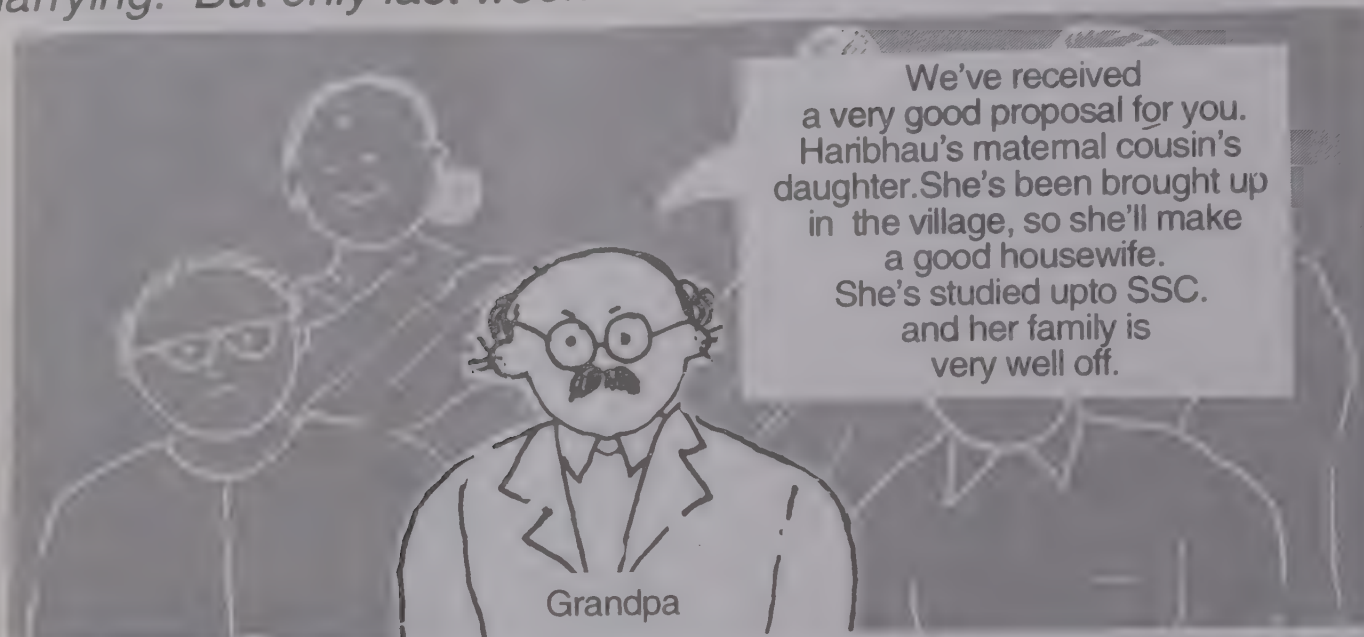


This might seem a trivial matter, but in every respect, it is the elders who decide what we should watch on TV, where we should go, what we should do.



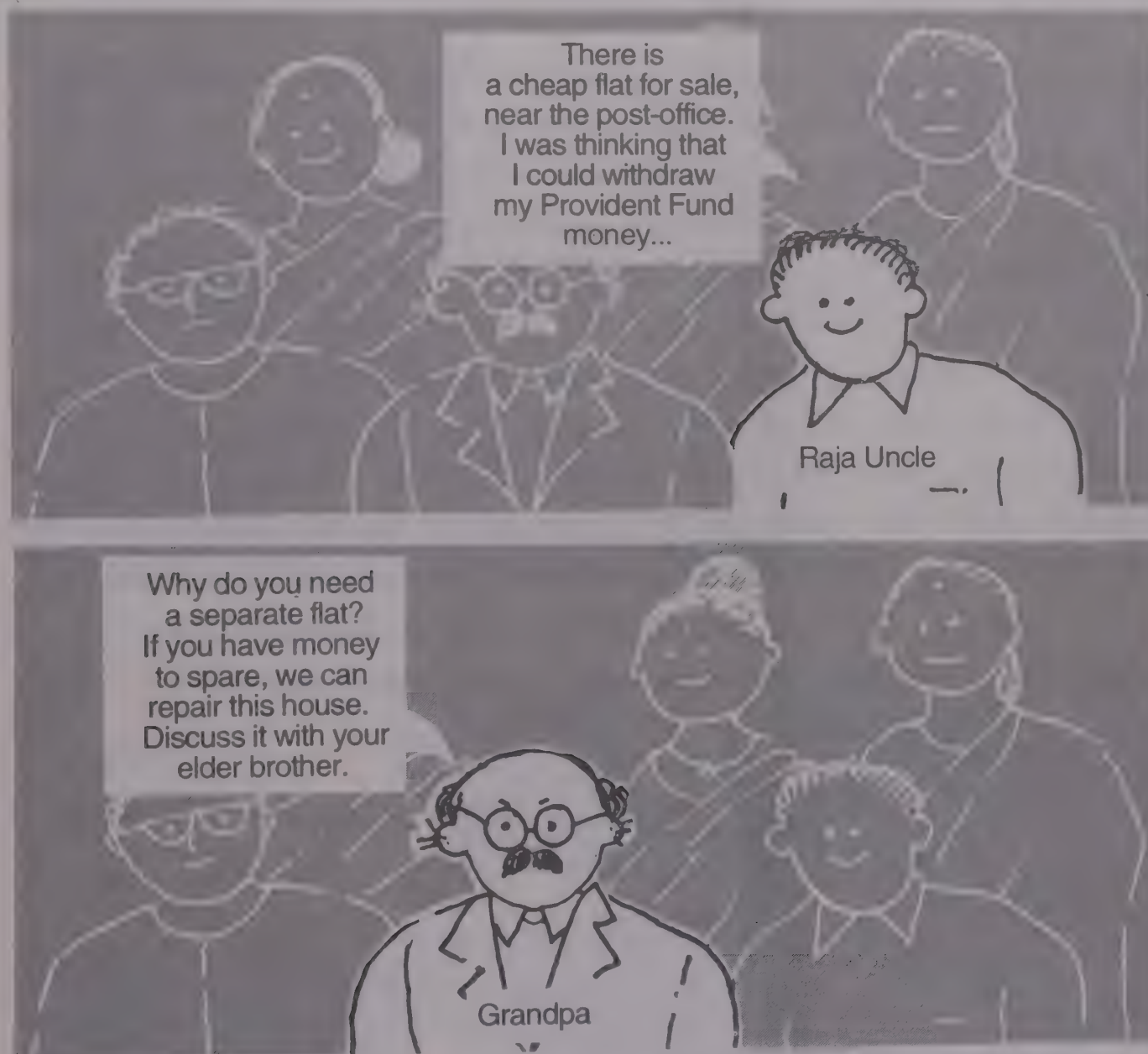
So that's a normal day in the life of my normal family. A day in which each one's place in the hierarchy is subtly asserted and reasserted. Everyone believes s/he is doing her/his duty, as a member of a 'good' family. Everybody appears to be contented, but is it really so?

Dilip has a girlfriend in college, whom he's very keen on marrying. But only last week:



Dilip is too afraid to tell Daddy the truth. Perhaps he never will, and might dutifully land up in an unhappy marriage not of his choice.

What the elders say is what goes. Even for Raja Uncle. He may bully Suman Aunty, but because he is a couple of years younger than Daddy, he has to listen to him, which irks him a great deal.



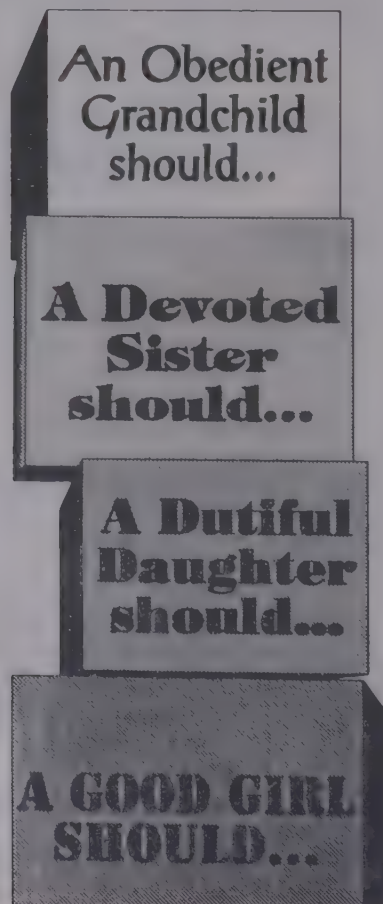
Raja Uncle's dream is to have a place of his own, where he can live separately with his family, but he wouldn't dare assert this, lest he be seen as disloyal and as wanting to break up the family.

Sometimes I wonder what there is to break up. In any case, though there are so many of us, all living together, our lives closely intertwined, each of us is lonely, because we cannot communicate our innermost feelings to anyone else. Nor can we openly express our opinions.

It is not only in my family that these kinds of things happen, When I talk to my friends and acquaintances, I realize that in most families, the exercise of power and decision- making tends to rest with the menfolk, particularly the older men; not that those of us at the receiving end accept this without a murmur. Whether it is Saraswatibai, our maid, who is openly critical of her husband, or my friend Ayesha, who ran away from home with her boy -friend, or even Mummy, who subtly gets her way, most of us have our modes of protest and resistance, either open or hidden.

In most cases, it's not that husbands want to oppress their wives, or parents to restrict their children. They all think that they're doing what's best, what's 'natural'. To them, it's 'natural' that husbands should behave in one way and wives in another, or that children should always obey their parents. But to me, all these 'shoulds', piled one on top of the other, become an enormous burden that threatens to crush my desires and dreams.

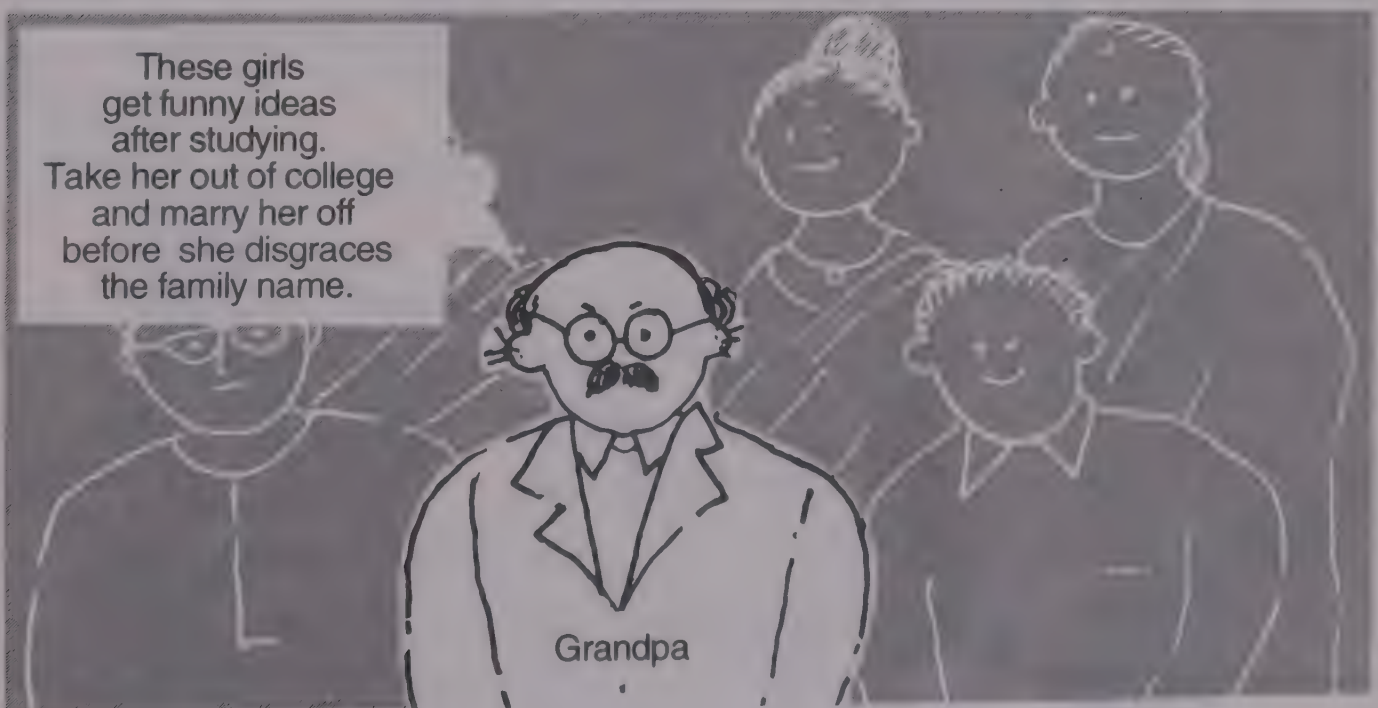
I am now 18. I would like to study architecture and become an architect, but my parents are already on the look out for a



husband for me. It doesn't occur to them that I would like to decide, for myself, when, whom and how I want to marry, if at all. But I am quite certain that I don't want to end up like Jaya Aunty: married at 18, deserted at 25, now 30 with nothing to look forward to.

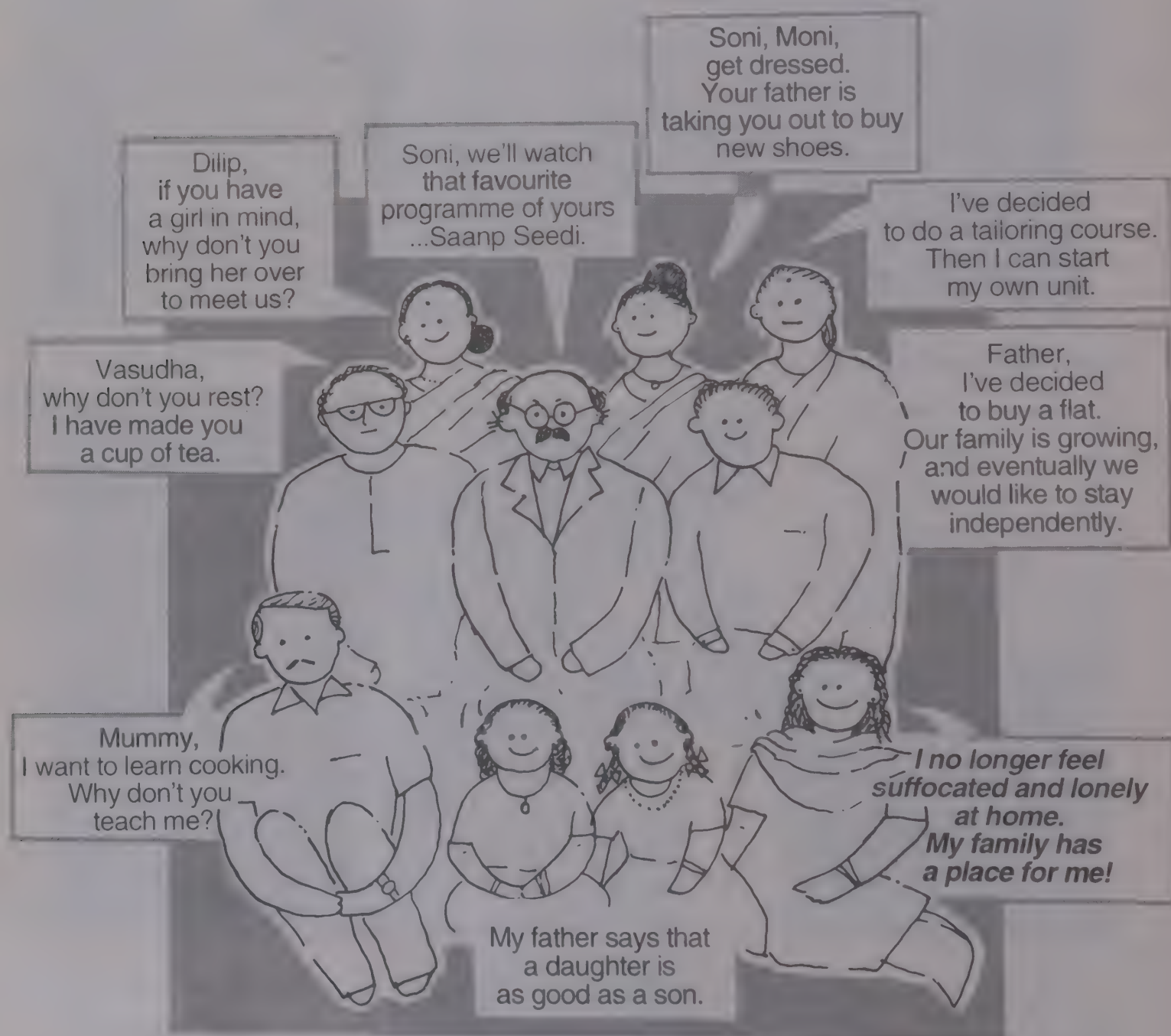


I can just imagine their reaction to that !



I remember that, as a child, when I didn't act like the meek girl of their expectations, I used to be beaten and punished. But that didn't break my spirit. Even now, I keep telling myself that I should not give up. Perhaps, someday, things can be different, not only for my 'normal' family, but also for others.

Maybe one Maya cannot change very much. But if all the Mayas and Dilips and Mummys and Daddys started reflecting on their own families, and began to accept that every family member, young or old, male or female, able or disabled, has a right - to dignity, resources, decision-making and care, then perhaps things could be different...



WORK BOOK

Maya has shared with us her feelings and reflections related to her family. Would you like to reflect on your own family?

Often, within families, the rights, responsibilities and roles of various members are taken for granted - these are traditions passed on from one generation to the next. But perhaps, we need to explore our feelings, desires and thoughts about these aspects of family life. This is the purpose of the exercises which follow.

MY FAMILY AND MYSELF

- 1. Who am I? What is the first thing that comes to my mind if I were to describe myself?**
- 2. What would I like to be?**
- 3. How am I seen by my parents and other family members? Am I put into a slot? Am I happy with this image? Does it coincide with my self-image?**
- 4. What picture comes to my mind when I think of my family? Whom would I include? How are various members positioned in my picture of my family?**
- 5. What are some of the things I like and appreciate in my family? These could concern what I feel the family does for**

me, family events or practices that make me feel good, or anything else.

6. What are some of the things about my family that make me unhappy?

7. Do I have a picture of the kind of family I would like to belong to? Is it very different from my actual family?

- **Role Play:** Act out how each member of the family would pose for a family photograph - the facial expression, the way of standing/sitting etc.

A place where I can laugh and cry,

Where there's a shoulder to lean on,

Where my worth is recognized,

Where I'm helped when I go wrong.

Where I can go, come what may,

And I am heard, whatever I say.

*A family where I can just **be***

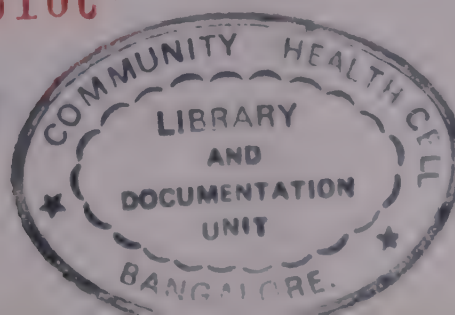
*Is a family with a place for **me!***

COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER

1. **What** are the activities that we do together in my family?
Do we enjoy doing any of these activities together?
2. **Do** members in my family, including myself, have fixed images and roles? **For** instance, the bright one, the quiet one, the decision maker, the talkative one ? **Do** we feel restricted by these images? **Do** they prevent us from communicating with each other?
3. **How** are various feelings expressed within my family?
For instance, anger: how do different members express anger? **Are** some afraid to express it? **Are** some usually targets of anger or ridicule ? **Other** feelings we could explore are: grief, affection and happiness.
4. **If** some family member is in grief, how do the others respond? **For** instance, are they indifferent, taunting or supportive?
5. **Do** I often feel that I cannot express what I really want, feel and think to other family members? **Can** I recall some occasions when this has happened? **Do** other family members also feel this way?
6. **Who** are the persons I feel closest to, in my family? **Do** I feel distant from any one ? **Can** I map out the relations between different family members, in terms of closeness or familiarity and distance? **Is** being too close suffocating?

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- **Role play: Act out how each member of my family would characteristically express anger and affection.**

Sita belongs to a 'nobody' family-

Nobody speaks, nobody hears,

Nobody expresses joys and fears.

Gita belongs to a 'onebody' family-

On and on does father talk,

While all the others silently gawk.

Smita belongs to a 'twobody' family-

Mother and sister are close to each other,

Father and brother go out together.

Mita belongs to an 'everybody' family-

Everybody has so much to share,

Everybody strives to love and to care.

DAILY ROUTINE AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **What** is the daily routine of the women in my family?
2. **What** is the daily routine of the men in my family?
3. In what way are these routines different? **Could** they be interchanged or flexible?
4. **What** are all the tasks involved in running my home ?
5. **Which** tasks are done by mother and the female members of my family? **Which** are done by father and other male members?
6. Is there a clear division of tasks, some being seen as 'only for women' or 'only for men'?
7. **Why** do these divisions exist?
8. If I were to marry and have my own family in the future, how would I like household responsibilities to be distributed?

- **Role Play:** Mother wants to go for a week long workshop with her mahila mandal friends, but feels the rest of the family might not be able to manage in her absence. How would father react? How would you react?

Are cooking and sweeping,

Washing and mending,

Mother's work,

Unseen and never-ending?

When everyone helps,

In a jiffy the job's done,

Work becomes easy

And all have fun!

A family has to make decisions of various types.
Some of the areas are:

- **H**ouse and property (buying a house, shifting residence)
 - **M**oney matters (how to spend, save and invest)
 - **D**aily domestic routines (food, TV programmes)
 - **C**hildren's lifestyles (clothes, friends, outings)
 - **C**hildren's education and career
 - **C**hildren's marriage choices
1. **H**ow are decisions made in each of these areas in my family? **I**s a given course of action taken for granted, by custom and tradition? **D**oes one person decide? **A**re there discussions on these issues, and everyone's opinion sought?
 2. **T**o what extent do all family members participate in important decisions? **D**oes any member have a veto power?
 3. **H**ow are differences of opinion resolved?
 4. **C**an I recall any incident where I have been unhappy with a family decision? **W**hat did I do?

- **Role Play:** I announce to my parents I have found a marriage partner of my choice. Act out their reaction to this.

If we have no say in our family,

Will we learn to shoulder responsibility?

Won't we feel small and unrecognized?

Dependent on father to lead and guide?

When mother, father and children too,

Put their heads together, a decision in view,

In finding a way, all have a stake,

Their tomorrows together they will make.

ACCESS TO FAMILY RESOURCES

1. Do girls and boys in my family have the same access to food, clothing and education?
 2. If there is differential access to these resources, is it obvious? For instance, is it taken for granted that boys should have more opportunities than girls? Or is it subtle - for instance, girls might be made to feel that they don't have an aptitude for higher or professional education?
 3. If discrimination exists, do I think it is justified?
 4. Have I ever felt discriminated against or discriminated in favour of? In both these instances, what were my feelings?
- Role play: I am a parent with limited resources and two children, a son and a daughter. I can only afford to send one of them to college. Act out the process of arriving at a decision.

A family has

A place for everyone,

When resources are shared

Between daughter and son.

To become a doctor is sister's wish,

But father says, that's not her niche.

For a daughter can only become a wife,

Housework and children, that's her life!

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY

1. **Does my family own any property? A house, some land?**
In whose name is this property?
2. **Is it known who will inherit the property? Are matters**
relating to division and inheritance of property discussed
in my family?
3. **As a daughter, do I feel I have any right to my parental**
property?
4. **As a brother, would I like my sister to have an equal**
right to the family property?
5. **If daughters have no rights to their parental home, what**
consequences does this have for their future choices?
6. **Do I know of any communities where daughters inherit**
property?

- Role play: I am a parent, owning one house. I have a son and a daughter. My daughter tells me that she would prefer a share in the property instead of a dowry. How will I react?

Father inherited our house from his father,

And everyone says he'll leave it to brother.

But what about me and mother?

To expect a share in my father's home,

Is not very womanly, I am told.

But I really want a place of my own,

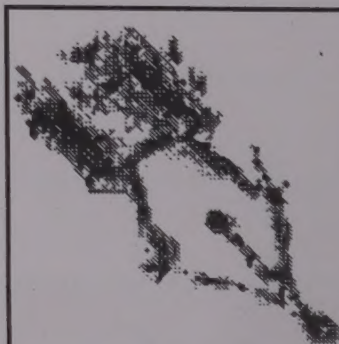
Not a dowry of silk and gold.

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Most of us are born and live out our lives within a family. Our families provide the basic framework within which our needs, for food, shelter, clothing, love, self-esteem and security are met.

But there is another aspect, which is often not considered - the family is also the place where the dominant relations of power in our culture are reproduced and reinforced. In many cultures, for instance, women are expected to be subservient to men, and younger family members to older ones. These distinctions are often seen as natural. The need to question these differences, and to assert the human rights of every family member to equality, freedom of choice and justice, forms the starting point of this booklet.

1994 is the **International Year of the Family**, the goal of which is "**building the smallest democracy at the heart of the society**". Our attempt is to facilitate a process of reflection and empowerment, among family members, that would work towards this goal.



1994

International Year of the Family

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